

Proper 24 B  
Mark 10:35-45  
October 20, 2024

*Unelectable!*  
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

<sup>35</sup>James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to [Jesus] and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” <sup>36</sup>And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?” <sup>37</sup>And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” <sup>38</sup>But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” <sup>39</sup>They replied, “We are able.” Then Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; <sup>40</sup>but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

<sup>41</sup>When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. <sup>42</sup>So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. <sup>43</sup>But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup>and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup>For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

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The story goes that many years ago, a man on horseback encountered a squad of soldiers as he was riding along a Virginia

road. The soldiers were trying to move a tree that had fallen across the way. A corporal stood over the men. “Heave,” he shouted. But the corporal’s orders were to no avail. The squad could not get the tree to move. “Why don’t you help them?” the stranger on the horse asked the corporal. “Me? Why, I’m a corporal sir!” Dismounting, the rider joined the soldiers. “All together boys, heave!” he said, adding his shoulders to the work. At that, the trunk lifted and the squad swung the tree out of the road. The stranger mounted his horse. As he prepared to ride on, the stranger addressed the corporal. “The next time you have some heavy lifting, corporal, send for your commander-in-chief.” The stranger was U.S. President George Washington.<sup>1</sup>

I like this story. Perhaps because there’s something so very organic, almost wholesome, about the President of the United States sweating right along with the “common folk.” It can definitely feel like we have more Corporals than Washingtons in politics, though. Jesus got it though. He was a man of the people. People could relate to him and he could relate to them, because he was one of them.

In our reading from Mark’s Gospel, Jesus’ friends were arguing over who would be given seats of honor when Jesus came into power. Jesus quashed their petty quibbling once and for all: “If you want to be great,” he said definitively, “you have to be the servant of all.” Some politicians and high-power leaders actually get this, at least on the surface. They understand the credibility gained and the political capital banked by shouldering up next to someone and getting their hands dirty.

While it may just seem like smart campaigning to us, it was pretty revolutionary in Jesus’ day. He completely flipped the prevalent socio-political culture on its head by contrasting the values of

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<sup>1</sup> Joe Iarocci. “Servant-Leaders Lift Trees,” Serveleadnow.com: <https://serveleadnow.com/servant-leaders-lift-trees/>.

Greco-Roman society, where one's power comes from wealth and authority over others, with the ideals of the realm of heaven where power lies in equality, mutuality, and service. Truthfully, if Jesus were around today, I'm not sure he'd be electable! And yet, this wasn't a ploy or publicity stunt for Jesus. He not only talked the talk, he walked the walk. Jesus took up the towel and wash basin and served. And he expects no less of his followers. Sometimes we boil Jesus' message down to loving others. That's not wrong, but it is incomplete. We need to go a step further to say that the way we love others is by serving them. That's what makes a true follower. That's what makes one great. *"Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant."*

A few years back, I brought a group of middle and high school youth to the East Garfield Park neighborhood of Chicago with two other adults for a week-long service/learning trip. The evening before we were set to return to the St. Paul suburbs from which we came, our hosts arranged a special closing worship service that featured foot-washing. I was playing the piano for the service, simple meditative music, while the youth washed one another's feet. I'm not gonna lie, I was incredibly relieved that I wouldn't have to have my feet washed by anyone! Or so I thought. Mark, one of the really cool high-schoolers, picked up the cloth and basin, came over, and bathed my feet. That was one of the most humbling experiences of my life. Service, ours or someone else's, has the power to move us, to change us, and to transform our world. *"Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant."*

I know that you get this. So many of you do so much for so many. You belong to service clubs; donate time and money to local food banks; shop for school supplies, kids' shoes, and Christmas gifts; mentor at Greenman school; work to create affordable housing; care for the environment; raise compassionate children; help neighbors; donate to disaster relief efforts; foster animals; grow

food to give away; provide free medical care; support music education for kids; volunteer at church, write dozens of cards to your minister; and so much more. You know about service. You know how to be servants. You know that's how we say *I love you* to people we don't know, but still care about. Today, if nothing else, let this sermon serve as a reminder that you are seen, you are appreciated, you are great. Jesus said so.

We also know that the ultimate test of greatness is when greatness itself becomes irrelevant – when we no longer focus on how we're seen, or what we've achieved, and we live lives of service just because it's the right thing to do, and it's one of the best ways to contribute to the healing of our world.<sup>2</sup>

As Jesus did, let's keep healing our world, one act of service at a time. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> John van de Laar. "Proper 24B," Sacredise.com, October 20, 2024: <https://sacredise.com/proper-24b/>.